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USIA Appointee Is Not Retiring Type

By Dorothy McCardle
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In the midst of an early retirement at age 59, a surprise job offer from the President of the United States and a chance to sleep at the White House seemed tops for excitement to Robert Wood Akers, newly appointed Deputy Director of the United States Information Agency.

But the pursuit of Akers to offer him the job was a Sherlock Holmes exploit in tracking down a modern Marco Polo.

Akers, a friendly man with a thatch of silver hair, retired 15 months ago as editor-in-chief of the morning and evening newspapers in Beaumont, Texas. He and his wife decided to take off for a leisurely trip around the world. They bought a foreign car and have been driving all over Europe by easy stages for the past year. They had expected to keep on traveling for a couple more years.

WHITE HOUSE officials tried in vain to track down the Akers for almost two weeks with lines out for them all over the Middle East.

Finally when the Akers reached Corfu, an island off the coast of Greece, there was an urgent summons to call the White House in Washington, D.C. Akers was told "not to leave Corfu."

So he and his wife, who speaks five languages, waited impatiently, wondering what was up. Last Thursday another call summoned Akers to Washington pronto. President Johnson, who has known Bob Akers for 30 years, wanted to talk to him.

Friday Akers was here, and the President offered him the USIA post. Akers accepted, and then the President compounded wonder upon wonder by suggesting: "I'm taking off for the ranch, so why don't you spend the night here at the White House?"

Akers did.

"White House service is the best I've ever had in my life," Akers said yesterday. (He's moved to the Mayflower while hunting for a furnished apartment.)

ON SUNDAY after President Johnson announced the appointment at the LBJ Ranch in Texas, Akers phoned his wife. She and the car will come to Washington by boat the end of August.

Mrs. Akers is German-born, has lived in France, and took up portrait photography in Madrid, Spain. She came to America many years ago and settled in Houston, Tex., where she won fame for her photography. She is now an American citizen.

Nine years ago she and Akers were married. She has been to Washington with him on editors' conventions. The last time was during the Kennedy Administration when former First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy had all the editors' wives to tea at the White House.

Mrs. Akers found herself standing next to Mrs. Kennedy and began chatting with the First Lady in French.

"Where do you come from?" Mrs. Kennedy asked Sibylle Akers.

"From Texas," replied Mrs. Akers.

"Oh, do they speak French

in Texas?" asked Mrs. Kennedy in surprise.

AKERS, who has three sons by a previous marriage, says that his wife is as pleased as he is that he will be doing a job for his country. The USIA post fits their mutual interest in foreign lands and peoples.